

**THE TOWN AND THE BOARD OF EDUCATION:
WORKING TOGETHER TO DELIVER THE ATHLETIC FACILITIES WESTFIELD
DESERVES**

On June 15, at our respective public meetings, we were authorized to sign a joint Letter of Intent ("LOI") for the Town of Westfield and the Westfield Board of Education to explore a shared service agreement for a proposed recreational project which would provide approximately 400,000 square feet of turf, lighted multi-purpose fields behind the Edison Intermediate School property.

This exciting step is the result of a thoughtful, long-term planning effort between the Recreation Commission's Parks & Fields Committee, the Board of Education's Facilities Committee, input from multiple stakeholders, and a cooperative and collaborative relationship between the Town and the Board of Education.

It comes as no surprise that providing new fields was one of the top recommendations from the Town's Strategic Parks Plan -- a publicly-driven initiative that provided Westfield with a holistic, long-term road map for optimizing its parks, recreation opportunities, and open spaces -- which was adopted by the Town Council in January 2020.

While multiple projects were identified as opportunities in the Parks Plan, the Recreation Commission Parks & Fields Committee proposed the Edison School Multipurpose Fields Project as the top priority. Since the Edison School property is not a Green Acres facility, unlike nearly all of the Town-owned municipal parks, it can be dedicated exclusively for Westfield teams and residents. In addition, by completing the Edison project first, the community gains immediate, expanded capacity that would benefit the largest number of potential user groups, while also offering the least disruption to existing fields during construction.

Currently, the Edison School fields are used almost exclusively by Edison School and Westfield High School for a variety of activities, including band, drill team, and practices for some Westfield High School sports teams. Only Westfield High School baseball games and select track and field event competitions are able to be held on the existing fields. The proposed project will accommodate and enhance the existing utilization by the schools while adding significant new fields capacity for use by a wide range of user groups in Town -- including girls and boys soccer, boys and girls lacrosse, field hockey, baseball, football, ultimate frisbee, and various other sports practices and potential civic uses.

The Edison School property is owned by the Board of Education, and the Letter of Intent has provided the initial framework for the shared service agreement, which states the Town shall pay \$1 per year for 30 years to lease the property, and will bear responsibility for the financing, design, construction, and maintenance of the facility in cooperation with the Board of Education.

The proposed concept has three phases, the estimated total cost of which is \$18.2MM if completed simultaneously. A determination for how best to move forward, whether in phases or all at once, will be made once project costs are finalized and after donations and sponsorships are considered. Due to the Town's legal and financial flexibility with capital projects and bonding capacity, the financing of the entire project will be administered by the Town. It is anticipated that revenues from the recently adopted PILOT agreement from the Westfield Crossing redevelopment project will be used to service the annual debt. Additionally, a capital campaign

seeking grants, sponsorships, and sports league contributions will commence once the final concept is approved after a public input process.

This Letter of Intent represents an exciting and innovative opportunity to pursue long overdue state-of-the-art athletic and recreational facilities for our student athletes and the Westfield community. We hope that this shared service model will usher in a new era of collaboration where the Town and the Board of Education work together to identify additional opportunities to improve services and facilities, and maximize the value we deliver to our taxpayers.

The outcome of this project will of course rely extensively upon the engagement and input of the public to help drive it to completion. We encourage all residents to review the information about the proposed project, including the recent presentation by Spiezle to the Town Council on June 15, the Frequently Asked Questions, Letter of Intent, and press release -- all of which can be found at westfieldnj.gov/edison-fields-project. At least three public meetings will be scheduled over the next three months before any plans are finalized, the details of which will be communicated in the coming weeks. In the interim, comments about the project can be directed to edisonfields@westfieldnj.gov.

We look forward to the next phase of this exciting endeavor, and are proud to forge this partnership to deliver the long overdue athletic facilities that Westfield deserves.

Westfield Mayor Shelley Brindle

Amy Root, President, Westfield Board of Education